

# EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN HOMILETIC MAGAZINE.

---

VOL. VIII.

JULY, 1910.

No. 7.

---

## Sermon on the Gospel for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

MATT. 7, 15—23.

Liberality, indifference in doctrine, is a characteristic of our time. Most people nowadays think that very little depends upon the fine distinctions of doctrine in minor points that separate the various churches. Hence they infer that it makes little difference to what church you belong, that it matters little what you believe, as long as you trust in Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world. It is frequently claimed that all the various points of difference separating the denominations, are only unimportant, unessential, and that they do not affect the vital nature and essence of faith. Hence the wide spread of the spirit of unionism and syncretism that endeavors to bring all the various church-bodies into a visible union, without first bringing about a true union in faith and doctrine, but rather overlooking and ignoring these differences that now divide them. Yea, there are those in our days that favor an amalgamation and conglomeration of all religious cults of the earth, Christian, Mohammedan, Jewish, and pagan, asserting that all these systems of religions have elements of truth in them which we cannot afford to ignore.

Now, is this really so? Is there really no vital, essential difference between the various Christian denominations, let alone the heathen, idolatrous cults? Does it really matter so little what doctrine in minor points we believe and confess? Is it all the same to which church we belong, and what doctrine we are taught from the pulpit? I say no, for the Bible says no; and it warns us often and explicitly against any and every false doctrine and against all such as preach false doctrine. Such a warning we also find in our text. Let us therefore consider

## THE SAVIOR'S WARNING: "BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS!"

In so doing, three points will claim our attention:

1. *To whom this warning is addressed;*
2. *Why it is necessary;*
3. *How it is to be heeded.*

## 1.

"Beware of false prophets!" such is the brief but earnest, impressive warning of the Savior in our text. To whom are these words addressed? Evidently they must be meant for those that are not prophets or preachers, for the common Christians. It is here made their duty to "beware of false prophets," to watch that no false teachers are tolerated in their midst, that their pastors preach to them the pure, unadulterated doctrine of the Word of God.

The prophets themselves, too, are to see to it that they do not become false prophets. They are to take heed to the doctrine. They, above all, are to search the Scriptures and make themselves acquainted with its teachings in all points, so that they may be able to teach their hearers the full truth of the Gospel. If for any reason, whether it be for the sake of their own reason, because it cannot see and understand many things that are set forth in the Word of God, or whether it be for the sake of their hearers, to preach to them such things as they like to hear and are agreeable to them, or whether it be for the sake of filthy lucre, or whatever their reasons may be, if they preach false doctrines, misleading their people and perhaps endangering their soul, or even leading them into perdition if thus they willfully become false prophets: woe, thrice woe unto them! Terrible will be the reckoning that their righteous Judge will hold with them on the great day of retribution; terrible will be the account they will have to give, terrible the punishment they will receive. "Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their own tongue, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them and cause my people to err by their lies and by their lightness. Yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord." Such are the earnest words of the Lord against false prophets and lying teachers.

Thus, therefore, the prophets have the solemn duty to watch lest they become false teachers. But that is not spoken of in this place by the Savior. He here evidently addresses the common Christians, the hearers of God's Word. They are to beware of false prophets. They are to watch that purity of doctrine is preserved in their midst, that nothing but the truth of God's holy Word is



preached to them from their pulpit. They are exhorted also by St. Paul: "Now I beseech you, brethren, to mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." They are also admonished by St. John: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." How plainly, in all these passages, is it made the duty of the common Christians, the hearers of God's Word, to watch, lest false teachers occupy their pulpits, to beware of false prophets!—And it is very reasonable and evident that it must be their duty to watch for this, for it is their soul that is to be saved, it is their soul, therefore, that will be endangered, if they allow a false teacher to be their pastor, if they commit their souls to the care of a man who does not believe and teach according to God's Word in all points, but follows his own notions and opinions at times.

Mark it, then, my hearers: to you, to you, this warning of Christ is addressed: "Beware of false prophets!" You, you, are to watch that no false teacher ever occupies this pulpit, that you entrust the care of your souls to no one that does not teach and hold and practice according to the Word of God in all points. If ever you would allow such a thing, if you would willfully or carelessly surrender yourselves to a false prophet, the fault would be yours, and if you will be misled by him and your souls are lost, you will have to bear the fault yourselves. Therefore, "Beware of false prophets!" For great is the danger that is connected with false doctrines. That is the second point to which I wish to call your attention.

## 2.

This warning against false prophets and false teaching is so necessary, because false teaching is such a dangerous thing. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing; but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Thus Christ Himself describes the danger threatening Christians from false prophets. They come in sheep's clothing; they claim to have been sent by God and to preach God's Word, even though they willfully and maliciously teach false doctrines and mislead their hearers. But inwardly they are ravening wolves. They kill the souls of their hearers; they destroy or, at any rate, endanger their spiritual life and their eternal salvation, and not infrequently lead them into eternal destruction. This Christ says of all false prophets. They all, even though they may be well-meaning men, though they may preach errors unwittingly, though they may not know any better and think they possess the whole truth, yet they are dangerous people, and must be guarded against. For all false teaching is a dangerous thing.

False doctrines are not such harmless, unimportant things as many people in our days would represent them to be. It is not all the same what we hold and teach in the minor, less important articles of doctrine, as long as we adhere to the more important ones. Nay, every false doctrine is a dangerous thing, which must be guarded against. For all false doctrines tend to lead us away from Christ, and thus aim their blow at the very center of our religion and at the eternal salvation of our souls. Not only is this the case with the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation, not by faith, but by works, which teaches man to rely, not in Christ, but in his own righteousness, and thus leads him directly to hell. Nor is this the case only with the many erroneous doctrines concerning the person of Christ, *e. g.*, that He is not true God, or that He was not the Savior of mankind, but merely a good and virtuous man, whose example we are to follow and thus save ourselves. I say, not only these and like flagrant heresies, which demolish with one stroke the foundation of our salvation,—not only these are dangerous, leading us away from Christ, but every false doctrine does this, however harmless it may appear. Take, for instance, the doctrine that conversion is not only God's work, but that man, in some way or other, must assist in his conversion. Does not this doctrine to some extent teach us that man must help towards his salvation? Does it not urge him to therefore trust in his own effort? Does it not detract from the glory of God and the merit of Christ? Or take the contemptuous way in which the means of grace, the Word of God and the holy sacraments, are regarded by so many people in our day, and the tendency to tell people to rely upon their own feelings and their own exertions instead. Is it not plain that thereby men are led away from Christ and encouraged to trust in their own works and their own exertions? And thus we might take many other doctrines. If we go to the bottom of it, we shall find that they all tend in that one direction, to lead us away from Christ and the Word of God, and make us trust in our own works and our own reason instead.

But false doctrine is dangerous in still another way. It engenders other errors, and if consistently carried out, every false doctrine must overthrow the whole Christian religion. For the articles of faith in our religion are not isolated, they do not stand each one by themselves, nay, they are closely and intimately connected, and if you destroy one, you destroy the others too. They are, as it were, links of one great chain; if, therefore, you break only one link, the whole chain is broken. Let me illustrate. Take the Roman Catholic Church. Their doctrines are full of the foulest, soul-destroying errors. Whence did they originate? It would be entirely



wrong to imagine that this church had always been as corrupt as it is now. It sprang from the good old church of the first centuries. The false teaching took its starting-point from the time that the bishops of Rome claimed supremacy over the other bishops of Christendom, until they had gained this supremacy. Then they began to build up a system of lies and falsehoods, adding one after the other, until finally they had reared a structure of the most devilish deceptions and frauds. In that Church of Rome one error grew out of another, and in the course of time their doctrine became so corrupt that by it nobody can be saved. For whenever people belonging to that church enter heaven, they do not get there by, but in spite of, their doctrine, because, discarding all lies, they simply cling to Christ. See where that church has drifted to after that first error and falsehood had gained admission in its midst! Again look at Zwingli, the contemporary of Luther. This man was led by his reason to deny one truth of God's Word, because, as he said, he did not believe God would ask us to believe anything that we could not understand. That first error of his was the denial of the true presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament. Now watch where this one error led him to: Because he would not concede the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, he was forced to assert that Christ's body is not present upon earth at all, that His human nature is not omnipresent, but after His ascension is confined within a certain place in heaven; indeed, his error finally led him to separate the two natures in Christ entirely, so that he asserted the divine nature had no communion with the human nature in His suffering and death, and hence that a mere man died for us on the cross. Thus he actually destroyed the foundation and hope of our salvation. Again, his denial of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament led him to assert that this Holy Supper is not a means of grace, bringing and sealing to us the forgiveness of sins, but a mere symbolical ceremony and a meal in commemoration of Christ's Holy passion. And this again led him to also deny the saving power of the other Sacrament, Baptism, and to make that a mere external sign and symbol of regeneration. And because he denied the saving power of Baptism, he logically inferred that children, at least those of Christians, must be without sin and holy, and thus can be saved without faith. Now that is by no means all. I could recount still more errors into which he was led by his first error of denying Christ's real presence in the Sacrament. But you may see from this how dangerous it is to harbor one single false doctrine, because it inevitably leads you on to others. Therefore, my hearers, "beware of false prophets!" Beware of errors in doctrine, and watch zealously that the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, be always proclaimed to you from this pulpit.

## 3.

Now how are you to do this? How are you to watch against false prophets and false teachings? How are you to heed the Savior's warning and act according to it? This I wish now to show to you briefly in the third place.

The Savior Himself gives you instruction as to how you are to know the false prophets. "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns," etc? So by their fruits you are to know them, and if by their fruits you find that they are false prophets, then you must shun them.

What, then, are the fruits of prophets? The office and work of a prophet is to preach; hence, the fruits that we look for with a prophet is that he preach rightly, that he proclaim the truth of God's Word. The passage is sometimes explained as though it meant the life of a preacher, that by his life you are to discern whether a preacher is a right or a false prophet. But that criterion is misleading. A prophet may lead a good, virtuous, and holy life; he may shine by his irreproachable conversation, and yet he may be a false teacher. And again, he may not be without reproach in his life, and yet he may preach the right doctrine, and in so far be a right prophet. Although you have a right therefore to expect your pastor to lead a godly life and to be an example to you in all things, yet it is not this whereby you must determine whether he is a right or a false prophet. This you can only know by the doctrine that he preaches. Therefore, in order to follow the Savior's warning, in order to beware of false prophets, you must watch and see that the right doctrine is preached to you in all points, and that no error is ever proclaimed to you from this pulpit. Thus alone can you beware of false prophets.

To this end you must prove the doctrine. How will you do that? According to what can you determine whether a doctrine is right or wrong? Answer: According to the Scriptures. They are "profitable for doctrine," as St. Paul says. From them we must get all our doctrines, and according to them we must prove them whether they are right or wrong. Every doctrine that agrees with the Scriptures is a right doctrine, and you must therefore humbly accept it, no matter what your heart or your reason may say. Every doctrine, on the contrary, that is opposed to the Scriptures is a false doctrine, and you must therefore reject it, no matter how well it may please your reason and understanding. And him who proclaims such antisciptural doctrine you are to mark as a false prophet, of whom you must beware and whom you cannot retain as your pastor if he persists in his error.



To be able to do this, to be able to discern right and wrong teaching, according to the Scriptures, you must study the Bible, you must search the Scriptures. You must not only read a chapter in your Bible now and then, nay, you must study it, you must convince yourselves what its teachings are in this point and that, and you must compare what is preached to you with this written Word of God. Now which of you does that? Which of you goes to the trouble to take down his Bible from the shelf or table and see for himself whether the sermon he has heard at church is really founded on the Bible? Brethren, I do not want you to accept everything I say, just because I, your pastor, say so. Nay, compare my sermons with your Bible, and if ever it should occur that you fail to understand something in them, if anything ever appears wrong to you, come to me and let us have a talk about it. Thus you will always, by the grace of God, attain to a clearer and more perfect knowledge of the truth of God's Word, and constantly grow in ability to heed the Savior's warning and to beware of false prophets.

Alas, the world is full of false prophets in our days! Therefore heed the Savior's warning! Beware of them, flee them; flee all false doctrines! They are dangerous and threaten to rob you of your soul's salvation. Oh, do not be drawn into this spirit of liberalism and unionism that would make you believe all churches are equally good, that there is only little difference between them; nay, adhere to the teaching of God's Word in all points, and hold to the church that teaches this truth pure and undefiled. "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." God help you to heed this earnest, solemn warning of your Savior! Amen.

---

### Pastoral Sermon on 1 Thess. 5, 24.

---

The importance of the pastoral office should never be underrated. The Christian pastor is not only made *responsible* for the souls committed to his care, but he is also *equipped* for efficient service. His duties are never in excess of his endowments; for all that God has demanded of a Christian minister He has also promised to supply. To adopt the language of St. Paul, "We have this treasure," the Gospel of Christ, "in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us," 2 Cor. 4, 7.

But the duties of the pastoral office may also be underrated, and that, by the pastor himself. If the pastor sets his aim too low, he will hardly ever be more than a ministerial amateur, and he may

sink so low as to become a hireling. If he sets his aim too high, he will become an enthusiast or a fanatic, and will finally be wrecked upon his own unhallowed ambition. — What guarantee, then, have we that the grave and important duties of the Christian minister will be discharged in such a way as to realize the purpose of God? Is the Church at the mercy of its ministers?

While acknowledging to the full extent the pastor's responsibility, it will greatly conduce to our own and to our people's comfort to keep in mind that in charging the pastor with the eternal welfare of souls the Lord does not discharge Himself of that duty. The saving of souls is not transferred from God to the minister, but the minister, by being called to the pastoral office, is elevated to the dignity of a "coworker with God," and it is only as such that he is said to save souls. The Christian pastor does not exercise the functions of a mediator between the Lord and the congregation in the sense in which a Romish priest claims to exercise them. In the matter of the salvation of souls the pastor is at no time and in no sense a substitute for God; but in every instance it is God who worketh in His chosen both to will and to do, according to His good pleasure, so much so, that he oftentimes effects His purpose regardless, yea, in spite of, the minister.

Apart from the host of Scripture passages which directly state this truth, Scripture furnishes some remarkable evidence that God practices in accordance with this truth. Take, *e. g.*, the first letter to the Thessalonians, which is commonly regarded as the first letter which St. Paul wrote, and in which, accordingly, the cares of a Christian pastor have found their earliest expression. It is addressed "unto the church of the Thessalonians," without mention being made of the pastor of the congregation. It appears from the fifth chapter of the Epistle that there were in the congregation persons engaged in the care of souls, for the apostle exhorts the congregation: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." And yet, when the apostle draws to the close, he places the salvation of the Thessalonians directly into the Lord's own hands, with these words: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And to this cordial wish he adds the significant promise which is to guide our present meditation: "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."

May the Spirit of grace and truth, together with your prayers, now assist me, to the end that I may strengthen and cheer you all, pastors and parishioners, by showing:



GOD'S ABIDING INTEREST IN OUR CONGREGATIONS—A SOURCE  
OF UNDYING COMFORT TO US.

## 1.

Our text can be advantageously studied by first noting its special application to the Thessalonians. The peculiar history of this second European congregation of the apostle furnishes a striking explanation of the words of our text.

It was under rather forbidding circumstances that the work at Thessalonica was begun: the report of the provoking treatment which Paul had received at Philippi had preceded him, and the apostle himself afterwards recalled the fact that he began to preach the Gospel at Thessalonica "with much contention." He did so with his usual straightforwardness, disdaining to insinuate himself into the favor of his hearers by flattering words, or a display of merely human graces. Notwithstanding this, the apostle had set his heart upon his Thessalonica mission, and with what loving devotion he must have labored at this place appears from many remarks throughout his letters. He wrote to the Thessalonians, after he had been forced to leave them: "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." And we recollect in what fond remembrance the apostle held this congregation to the end of his life, and in what high terms of commendation he would speak of it to other congregations.

Pity, we will say, that his ministration at Thessalonica was so abruptly terminated! After little more than three weeks, during which he had preached at the Jewish synagogue on three successive Sabbaths, and had labored, as he states himself, "night and day" in private pastoral work, he was compelled to leave the city, and flee to Berea and Athens. The fierce opposition of the Jews had dashed his fond hopes for the work at Thessalonica, and it was with great reluctance that he quitted it. At Athens he was in anxious suspense for news from Thessalonica and held himself in constant readiness to return. What would become of the young mission? Would not the recent converts to the faith speedily succumb to the temptations common in a great commercial city? Would they keep themselves unpolluted with the taint of pagan unchastity? Would they shun the proverbial dishonesty of the Greek merchant? Would they renounce the fashionable idleness of the great city, and labor with their hands to eat their own bread? We can understand the deep concern of the apostle; for we all have been and are similarly affected when musing upon the fruits of our pastoral labors and the stability of our work.

Soon worse dangers had arisen to the congregation than any that the apostle had anticipated: the congregation had become infested with chiliasm. And, in combating the millenarians, the better part of the congregation was resorting to unscriptural arguments. The contention, as is usual, was carried into the Scriptures; and while one part was clearly guilty of a fanciful, mystical interpretation of the Word, the other part was bidding fair to turn rationalists, and to deny the validity of prophecy. Twice Timothy was sent from Athens with letters of urgent warning, and twice the apostle was gratified to learn that the danger had been repelled. In these perilous times, amid fightings within and fears without, the young congregation grew and waxed strong and became one of the leading congregations in Macedonia and Achaia. "Ye are our glory and joy," the apostle wrote to the Thessalonians. In view of these experiences, how pertinent is the allusion of the apostle to the faithfulness of God, who had signally prospered the work begun so unpropitiously in this wicked city.

The apostle bases his trust in the faithfulness of God to the Thessalonians upon the fact that God has called them. To the Corinthians he writes in exactly the same strain: "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord," 1 Cor. 1, 9. In the call of grace to a sinner, then, lies the earnest of a pastor's hope that the sinner will be guided to perfection. The call is a call to all the stages of a Christian life, from regeneration to glorification. God does not call to cast off again; "if we believe not," so Paul instructs Timothy, the Christian pastor at Ephesus, "yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself," 2 Tim. 2, 13. In and with the call God assumes a responsibility far greater than any that He lays upon the minister, a responsibility which gives Him an abiding interest in the person or persons called. There is not a husbandman as deeply concerned about the growth of his crop as is the Lord in the planting of a Paul, and the watering of an Apollos; for it is He that giveth the increase. There is not an architect in such unremitting attendance upon the building which he has undertaken as is the Lord in that house which is being built for an habitation of God through the Spirit, upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself for the chief corner-stone. Yea, Scripture suggests still a nobler parallel than that of the farmer and his field, or the builder and his house, to illustrate the intimacy with and the perpetual good-will of the Lord toward a Christian congregation; Paul, namely, finds in the conjugal love of a husband to his wife a type of the love of the Redeemer to the Church, and feels constrained himself to express his wonder at this union of tenderest affection



and constant fidelity in these words: "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church," Eph. 5, 32.

St. John the Divine has in his Revelation given an account of seven churches in Asia. Figurative interpretations of this account, notwithstanding they are often striking and full of apt applications, are hardly as striking and useful as the plain doctrine which John has illustrated by his account, namely, that the Lord maintains an abiding interest in Christian congregations. Those congregations in Asia actually existed, and their condition was known to the Head of the Church. He had followed them and the work of their pastors with wakeful eye through all their trials and afflictions; He had witnessed, as one invisibly present in their midst, their glory and their shame; He subjects them to a searching criticism, and with impartial fairness sets forth their virtues and shortcomings. Already the manner in which He introduces Himself to the churches is remarkable: the church at Ephesus He addresses as the One "that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." He had in the days of His flesh compared Christians to a light on a candlestick, and His apostle has prayed that in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation his Philippians might shine as lights in the world, Phil. 2, 15. These lights the Lord holds in His own hands and walks among them. To the church of Philadelphia, the type of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, He says: "These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth: I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my Word, and hast not denied my name." Here He again reveals that close acquaintance with all the facts which show the working of the word of grace in this congregation. And what a touching introduction is that to the church of Laodicea! How must its surfeited and lukewarm members have been stung with remorse when hearing themselves addressed: "These things saith Amen, the faithful and true Witness!" The contrast between the Lord's watchful care for them and their own indifference must have caused the blush of shame to mantle their cheeks.

Yes, "faithful is He which calleth you, who also will do it." Christian congregations, missions, every field and department of pastoral labor, are centers of interest at the throne of grace, objects of deep concern to the Bishop of souls. There is not a sermon preached to men but what Christ and His Spirit attend, not as witnesses and critics, but as enforcers. There is no trouble in the congregations but what Christ in due time puts forth His hand to

allay. Pastors come, and pastors go: seasons of spiritual progress are followed by times of spiritual standstill, torpor, and decay: He holds out through them all, and by His marvelous power by which He can bring good even out of evil He can bless even times of religious dearth, sad contentions among the churches and the members of congregations, in such a manner that even these must redound to the spiritual advancement of His called. In view of the faithfulness of Him who calls us, we are justified in saying that no Christian minister has ever labored in vain, though he may never have the least intimation of his success.

But, if God is all in all also in the ministry, what need is there of this office?

## 2.

In the merciful attentions of God to His called, pastoral work forms an important item. Our call to the ministry flows from the call of grace which God issues to sinners. We believe, in accordance with Matt. 18 and John 21, that the power of the keys is vested in the Christian congregation. This means that only those whom God has called by His grace can call a pastor. Our congregations, when issuing their call to us, are careful to introduce themselves to us as the called of God at a certain place. The call of a missionary is issued upon the same authority.

We shall connect our call to the ministry with the call to salvation which the souls among whom we labor have received. This latter call, as we have seen, rests upon the faithfulness of God. Is not, then, our pastoral call an act of God's faithfulness to our people? Most assuredly. Our congregations, in calling us, are guided by the Word of God, and are acting in His fear. God Himself endorses the call of the congregation, and convinces the called pastor that in his call the voice of the people is, in the most exalted sense, the voice of God.

It is because God intends to continue His jealous care for the congregations that He has been at such pains to specify so minutely the requirements of a Christian pastor, as He has done to Titus and Timothy; to point out the possible consequences of pastoral negligence, as He has done to Ezechiel; to fill pages of His Holy Book with urgent warnings to pastors to continue in reading the Scriptures and in prayer; and, last but not least, to pour out upon the pastoral office that unparalleled number of the surest, richest, and most extensive promises of His gracious assistance in their labors here and of His bounteous rewards hereafter. All this certainly flows from the abiding interest which He maintains in the congregations which His Spirit has called and gathered; it is because He is so deeply concerned about them that He manifests such deep con-



cern about us. Yea, does not our text also throw a great deal of light on the words of St. Paul: "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful"? The apostle pronounces pastoral fidelity the one indispensable requisite in a minister; our text assures us: "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." Pastoral fidelity is the reflex of divine faithfulness; the Lord Himself is the minister's grand pattern. More than this, He constantly purveys to the pastor and sustains in him that one great essential virtue of faithfulness without which the ministry cannot exist.

The one and only care of a pastor, that which surpasses all his other cares, is the care for the spiritual weal of his people in time and in eternity. This care incites him to indefatigable labor, prompts him to any sacrifice, and at times fills him with those dreaded doubts and fears as to his efficiency which we all, I dare say, have experienced. But can the pastor's care ever exceed that of the Lord? When even the poor heart of sinful man can rise to such a height of loving devotion, or be fired with such zeal as animates pastors faithfully devoted to their flocks,—to what transcendent heights will the devotion of God to His called rise, and to what unrelenting efforts will His divine zeal spur Him?

This promise, then, "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it," reveals to every pastor an inexhaustible source of undying comfort. It places our entire work into organic connection with the grace of God which was before the world began; it invites us to view this work in a way that causes all its difficulties to vanish. We may deplore our inefficiency, we may sink under an overpowering sense of our infirmities, we may be crushed by the discovery that instead of progressing our congregations have been falling back; we may brood over our sermons, vainly striving to draw the water of life from what appears to be a barren rock; or we may come with a good sermon and find a most unappreciative audience; and we may, when taking a grand review of our labors, come to the bitter conclusion that we have labored in vain. Then let us remember the promise: "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." The Lord does not cast His servants off, as men are wont to do; nor does He judge them as mercilessly as the servants oftentimes are judging themselves. He accepts of all our unsatisfactory work, and turns it to blessed advantage among His called people.

So let us be cheerful and confiding in all our labors, and not destroy even our little efficiency by despondency. Let us be patient with ourselves and with our flock, and believe that the faithful promises of the Lord who binds Himself to "do it" cannot fail. Returning to our posts of duty after this brief season of brotherly

intercourse and spiritual refreshment, may the approved counsel of James accompany us: "Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord! Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy," James 5, 7—11. Yea, be it ever so! Amen.

---

### Sermon Outline on Ps. 32, 1. 2.

---

Forgiveness of sin, freely offered and bestowed by the grace of God, and secured by faith, without the deeds of the Law,—this is the central and cardinal teaching of Scripture. With the proclamation of this saving truth Christianity entered upon its world-conquering career in the days of the apostles.

Forgiveness of sin by grace through faith,—with this teaching the Evangelical Lutheran Church began her existence. At the outset our Church declared that all the assurance, joy, comfort, which a believer possesses during his earthly life, is drawn from this teaching. "Neither would it be possible," our Confession states, "that a saint, great and high though he be, be fortified and make his stand against the accusations of the Law, against the great power of the devil, against the terror of death, and, lastly, against despair and the anguish of hell, if he would not grasp the divine promise, the Gospel, as a tree or branch in the great flood, in the strong, violent stream, amidst the waves and billows of the anguish of death; if he would not by faith cling to the Word, which proclaims grace, and thus obtain everlasting life without any works, without the Law, purely by grace. This doctrine alone sustains Christian consciences in afflictions and in the anguish of death." (Apol., Art. III, 210. Mueller, p. 143.)

The text before us is the leading statement of the Bible in its Old Testament form on the nature, contents, and grandeur of that act of God when He pardons a sinner. It is a jubilant exclamation, a shout of triumph, in which the pardoned sinner asserts his matchless righteousness, and expresses his boundless joy at having found this righteousness. St. Paul has woven this text into his masterly discourse on justification in Rom. 4, 5—8. In the light of New



Testament events, in the light of the Redeemer's atoning work, this text comes to be fully understood and appreciated. It is the very essence of the Gospel.

### THE JOY OF THE PARDONED SINNER.

#### *1. The facts on which the pardoned sinner rests his joy.*

A. To fully grasp the meaning of such a statement as this: "Thy sins are forgiven thee!" it is necessary to understand what sin is, and what forgiving is. Our text employs three terms to describe either. This is not meaningless redundancy, but is done for the purpose of exhibiting fully the force and scope of either term, to show what a multifarious evil, what a many-headed monster sin is, and what a mighty grace, what grace abounding the forgiving God places over and against it for its removal.

B. The evil which separates fallen man from God may be considered under different aspects. It is

a. "Transgression," *i. e.*, an offense against God's Law, lawlessness. Man has broken away from his rightful Ruler, has risen in rebellion against his Sovereign, has renounced his allegiance, and refuses to pay further homage to his Lord and Master. And what a Ruler he has renounced! Considering the numberless kindnesses that had been showered upon him, the happy state which had been prepared for him, the glorious destiny held out to him, his revolt was the basest ingratitude, devilish delusion, and heaven-storming conceit.

b. Man's defection from rightful authority is "sin," *i. e.*, a missing of the mark, a false step, a grievous stumbling and fall. Man gained nothing but lost all by sin. His sin resulted in the greatest tragedy. Following the lure of the Tempter, the sinner is not guided to success but to failure, despair, ruin. Sin holds out delights, but its charms are cheats, promises made to the ear and broken to the hope. With high-flown aspirations the sinner starts out, but his pathway through life is one vast chain of blunders. And his case is the more tragic because he imagines his errors are the height of wisdom.

c. Man's rebellion and sin are "iniquity," *i. e.*, the opposite of that which is even, straight, plain. Sin is a crooked thing, a tortuous twisting from every rule of right, winding with serpentine cunning and malice, creeping, worming its way to the desired object. It is all perverseness, distortion, divergence from equity, truth, uprightness.

Thus the psalmist in eloquent sadness preaches by the terms which he employs to describe sin, the utter depravation, worthlessness, and defilement of the person whom God chooses to pardon.

C. For the many-sided evil in man God has an adequate cure. "Each aspect of sin has its own cure." The three verbs in the text which describe the pardoning act of God might be called the eloquence of forgiving grace.

a. The transgression is "forgiven," literally, "lifted up," "taken away," removed. God has lifted the ban from the rebel. The stigma of lawlessness, and the burden of guilt resulting from it, has been taken up by Another, who came to take away sin and transgression. He *has* taken it away, has placed it out of sight, cast it into the depth of the sea.

b. The sin is "covered;" like the foul thing that it is, God has buried it, hidden it, concealed it. When His pure eye falls upon the sinner, He does not behold what is odious and abominable to Him. The sinner has a cover for his blundering deeds; a Propitiator, a Mercy-seat, has been appointed him, and sheltering beneath His protection, the sinner is safe from his Judge.

c. The iniquity is "not imputed," *i. e.*, not regarded nor reckoned as such. It is there, surely. The sinner, his fellows, the devil, the angels, God, know that it is there. But while all the rest are bent upon laying the iniquity up against the sinner, making careful record of it, casting it in the sinner's teeth many a time, God determines not to look upon it, but to regard it as nonexistent, and the sinner himself, in spite of his transgression, sin, and iniquity, as a pure and holy being.

Surely, this is a safe ground on which to base joy!

## 2. *The way to attain to this joy.*

A. Paul does not quote the last statement in our text when he describes the sinner's justification. These words: "in whose spirit there is no guile," describe no element which God considers whenever He justifies.

B. These words state what sinners attain to the joy here described. A hypocrite, any person who is unwilling to honestly measure his condition against God's Law, and to seriously and sincerely take God's threats against sinners at their full value, will never appreciate the divine pardon, because he fails to see its necessity, and to grasp its immense scope and glorious meaning. The truly contrite heart, which divests itself of all false show of righteousness, and without guile, frankly, admits its utterly lost condition; only such a heart can appreciate the boon and blessing of the divine pardon.

C. Such a heart will join, too, in the exclamation of joy and amazement which transported the psalmist when he wrote our text: O the blessednesses! O the happiness of the man who truly understands what it means: God forgives sinners their sins!